

Admiral Turner's Address to the Lions Club

Lexington, Kentucky - 12 April 1978

I am really very pleased to be here with you today. There is nothing that does a bureaucrat from Washington so much good as to get out of Washington and away from that Eastern seaboard where we really think that everything we do and hear is the way people of the great country of the United States really feel. It is good for us to get out where we do find what the outlook of the country really is. What I would like to discuss with you today is what I think the outlook of our country ought to be today about its intelligence activities.

We all recognize that there's been almost three years of intense public criticism of past intelligence activities; some of it justified, much of it not. But today I'm optimistic because I feel, and I hope I'm right, that there is a turning point here and that we're beginning to see in the public response a constructive attitude towards not just criticizing, but towards asking what do we need, what should we have, and how can we have a good intelligence service in this country while still protecting our American values, the Constitutional rights of our citizens and doing this in a difficult atmosphere where we must, in the intelligence business, do a lot of our work in secret. It's a difficult, interesting challenge. I'd like to outline for you a couple of things we are doing today to try to be more effective in the way we conduct our intelligence, and a couple of things we're also doing to be sure that at the same time we protect these American values and rights of our citizens.

First, to be more effective, we're putting great emphasis on insuring that the product of American intelligence is really keyed to the

needs of this country in the 1970s and 1980s--not to what we needed a few years ago. I think today the need for good intelligence is greater than it has ever been in the 30 years since we formed a central intelligence organization for this country. For instance, if we look back 30 years at our military position in the world, we all recall how dominant we were at that time. And yet, since then, the Soviet Union, not being able to compete with us politically or economically, has spent a great deal of its effort in the one area where they felt they could compete--military power. Today we find ourselves in a position something akin to military parity. Now the difference here is that good intelligence of what enemy capabilities, and perhaps intentions, are is much more important than the condition of parity than one where we had tremendous superiority. It gives our decision makers in peacetime and our military commanders in wartime great leverage if they can understand better what the other side can do and might do. Nobody gives these things away of course, but there are always clues that are dropped here and there and we in the intelligence business must take those clues, piece them together, and come up with advice and recommendations to our policy makers.

But not only has the world changed in the military sphere, but it changed in the political these last 30 years. For instance, 30 years ago we were the dominant political power and most, or many at least, of the smaller nations of the world took their cue from us. Today, the smallest, the newest nation eschews domination by either the United States or the Soviet Union; they go their own independent way as we appreciate almost every day. I don't think that's necessarily bad, it's probably very healthy. But what it means for us is that if we are to maintain our role as the leading nation in the world of free nations, we must understand the aspirations, the cultures, the attitudes, the outlooks of these many

nations with whom we must deal. That takes good insight, good political intelligence, much more important to us today than in the past when we dominated this scene.

Much the same can be said about the world of economics. Thirty years ago we were totally independent economically. It's almost a truism today to talk about our interdependence and to point to the OPEC control of the world energy, or at least oil energy, and so on as evidence of that interdependence. So today, economic intelligence is of growing importance to our policy makers because economic decisions made other countries--the European Economic Community, Japan, the Soviet Union, and many others--can have a tremendous affect on you and me, on our pocketbooks, on our economy here in this country. Yet, in some of those, like the Soviet Union, those critical economic decisions are made in great secrecy despite the impact they will have on the entire world economic picture. So it is incumbent upon us to increase our abilities in the economic intelligence sphere. These are exciting challenges to us to expand our scope of intelligence from just military to political and economic from what used to be a primary focus on the Soviet Union to today's attention to many many more countries with whom this nation does have good and legitimate business. Let me not overstate this--good intelligence on the Soviet military threat is our number one intelligence priority and must remain so. But we must today, in your intelligence community, expand and be able to cope with the additional dimensions of intelligence which I have just mentioned. And in doing that, the second thing I'd like to mention is that we've changed our production lines.

The standard production unit of intelligence throughout history has been the human intelligence agent - the spy. You remember that Joshua sent two other men to jericho before he marched around the walls. That

same human intelligence agent has been the backbone of all intelligence activities ever since; well, at least until a decade, or decade and a half ago when we encountered a revolution in what we call technical means of collecting intelligence. This is an exciting change to the way we produce intelligence. Today, the quantities of data that flow in from these technical collection sources is just vast. It boggles our ability to handle it, to process it, to sort it, to figure out what is most important, to keep track of it, to piece it together, to make a picture out of a bunch of pieces of puzzle. Much the same is true I imagine at the University of Kentucky campus across the city here, where information is just proliferating, and I am sure the same is true in many of your businesses.

Interestingly, in my business, the advent of these technical systems and this great flood of additional data has accented even more than in Joshua's time, the importance of the human intelligence agent. Why? Because when I go to a policy maker and say I've got a whole lot of information here collected from technical means which tells you what happened generally, yesterday or maybe today, in some foreign country, I'm always asked a couple of questions: why did that happen and what's going to happen tomorrow, why are they doing that? Well, that's the forte of the human intelligence agent. So today our change in production line is that we must integrate the human and the technical means of collecting intelligence. We must bring them together as a team so they complement each other, so that when we don't get the information from one or the other, we put the other one to work on it and try to fill in those gaps. It's a change in doing business, it really is. It's as though those of you in the manufacturing industries here didn't put in a new production line with many new pieces of machinery instead of relying simply on one basic, tried process.

While we're improving our product and our production line, we're also doing things to insure that we conduct our intelligence business within the bounds that the American public desires. First, we're following a policy today of greater openness, greater ability and willingness rather, to share information with the American public. Intelligence has traditionally operated under a cloak of great secrecy, and there's a great need for secrecy. But at the same time, I firmly believe that the American public has the right to know as much about what we do as we can share with them. Because the more we can share the more we can help enhance the quality of the American debate on important international topics. The more we share with the American public, the more feedback we get; the more interchange we have that helps us from getting into a little rut and accepting standard views rather than exploring and looking for new ideas and new hypotheses. And the more we share, the more we can make the American public appreciate what we do for them; the more we can build up some sense of confidence that we are, in fact, serving this country to the very best of our ability.

So, what we do today is when we do a classified study and when we're all finished with it and we put the label on the top of it that says top secret, or confidential, or destroy before reading, we ask can we take out the information in there that first of all would give away how we got the information. Because if we give away the way we obtained it, we won't get it again. If everybody in the Axis Powers had known during World War II that we were breaking their code, we'd have soon lost that capability. So we must protect our sources, and ways of getting information. Secondly, we take out of these studies any very unique information that gives our policy makers a distinct advantage because they have it and nobody else does. But if, when we've done these two things, there is still enough left to be of real value to the American public, we publish it. Over two

studies a week this past year were published. Topics like the world energy situation, the outlook for the next ten years, the world steel market, the prospects for terrorism in the international sphere, and so on. We hope that these have indeed helped the American public debate.

Another reason for publishing more unclassified data however, is to help protect that information which must be kept secret. There is simply too much classified information in our government today and that engenders a lack of respect for it. We see that in many ways today. We see people going out and writing stories, publishing books that transgress the bounds of accepted rules and secrecy. That, I would suggest to you, is a very dangerous thing if it continues on and if it leads to what I would describe as a situation of real chaos: when every one of us, 215 million Americans, feels that he knows best and has the right to decide what this government can keep secret and what it should not keep secret. I think the time has come to set aside the Watergate mentality which says that automatically any of us who are your public servants are suspect and are really out to only feather our own interests, rather than to do what is good for the country.

I'm not suggesting that you take us just on our word or our appearance, but I'm suggesting that the second thing we have done in recent years to give the American public even greater assurance of how we are conducting intelligence activities, is to accent what I call the oversight process. Now because we must maintain a great deal of secrecy, we cannot have what would be called public oversight, but we can have surrogate public oversight. I got in trouble the other night, I made mention of this in a group of people from St. Louis and they said that down there, with Masters and Johnson, that surrogate has a different meaning that I was using. Seriously, we have today out of this crucible of public criticism

of the last three years, forged a surrogate process for conducting oversight of the intelligence activities of our country. The first surrogate is the President of the United States and the Vice President. They take a very keen interest and give me a lot of their time to insure that they do know what is going on in the intelligence world. The second surrogate is a body that was created just two years ago called the Intelligence Oversight Board: three distinguished Americans who report only to the President of the United States and whose only task is to check on the legality and the propriety of what I and the other members of your intelligence community are doing. Anyone in the community, anyone in the public, may communicate with these people and make suggestions to them as to what should be looked into. Thirdly, we have within the last year and a half, established two committees of the Congress, one in each chamber, to oversee the overall intelligence process of the country. These oversight committees are very, very useful and they are doing I think a rigorous, thorough, but fair job, in checking on us and having us report to them as to what we're doing, and it's of good value to us. It frankly helps us share the load with the difficult decisions we sometimes must make. But beyond that, it helps to keep us in touch with the public and the attitude of this country.

There are, of course, risks in all this oversight. First, there is the risk that it will lead to leaks of information. The more people who know a secret, the more likely it is to leak. Secondly, there are risks of intelligence by timidity. If we have to tell too many people, we may not take risks which we must take from time to time. I would say to you in all sincerity that we are today seeking to find the right balance between the amount of oversight and the degree of risks of either leaks or timidity that we should be accepting in this country in our intelligence

activities. I think it will take another year or two before I can come back here and assure you that that proper balance has been found. It's a gradual process that takes a combination and understanding between us and the public, between us and the Congress, between us and the President, and so on down the line. I believe we are moving in the right direction. I believe sincerely that, on the one hand, we are strengthening the process of collecting and evaluating intelligence information and that we are today the number one intelligence service in the world. I also believe, on the other hand, that we are doing this while finding the right balance to protect the rights and values of the American citizens in the process. I assure you that I am dedicated both to keeping our intelligence number one in the world, and at the same time doing so in a way that will only strengthen our democratic institution.

Thank you very much.

Q&A - LIONS CLUB - LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

Q: What could be done to prevent ex-CIA agents and others from writing books and divulging information?

A: That's a very good question. You may note that our Attorney General, Griffith Bell, has recently taken what I think was a difficult but courageous decision. He is prosecuting a gentleman named Snepp who recently did publish a book, published a book in defiance of the fact that he had both signed a written agreement with us that he would submit his book, or writings, to us for security clearance only--an agreement all of our employees at the Central Intelligence Agency make. He also violated an oral promise made to me personally that he would do so. The Attorney General is prosecuting him on the grounds that he broke this contract and we hope this will be an example to others that they cannot ignore an agreement such as this. Beyond that, sir, I would only say I think, as a country, we need to recognize that the so-called whistle-blowers who came out of this Watergate mentality are not necessarily heroes; that they should, instead of just going out and writing a book and publishing it, they should use these established oversight procedures at least first to see if they can't get the recourse that they want through those procedures. I have yet to find a so-called whistle-blower who did that. He went out on his own, I think more for self-serving purposes generally, rather than to really help the country by publishing.

Q: I heard recently where the Russians again have missiles in Cuba and now that we have gathered this information, what are we going to do with it? I haven't heard anything else about it.

A: I don't have any information about new Russian missiles in Cuba, certainly not missiles that....

Q: I read an article in one of the weekly magazines that there was information gathered that they now have their missiles and sites again in Cuba and so forth, and you're saying this is not according to what we....

A: I'm saying that I don't have that information and it does prove that occasionally I make mistakes but I think almost more often that you'll find that you can't always believe what you read in the press. I think we'd be alerting a lot of people if we thought we were back in the same situation we've been in before.

Q: Do you feel that the Carter Administration is weakening this country militarily--our military forces?

A: Do I think the Carter Administration is weakening this country militarily? Are you asking me whether I should try to resign tomorrow, or.... No, seriously, I do want to make a serious point here. I'm unfortunately not going to answer your question directly, not because I don't want to be forthright with you. I do want to emphasize to you that when I took off my Admiral's hat in terms of leaving my Navy job and I came to the Central Intelligence job, I had to recognize that I was leaving a role as being a policy maker--someone who tried to have an opinion and influence what the shape of our military was--to someone who should not play a policy making

role. Because if ever our intelligence people take sides--with a policy axe to grind--on the intelligence that comes in and must be evaluated and provided to our policy makers.... So, I really am encumbered from commenting on your question.

Q: Admiral Turner, are you having difficulty at the present time in securing agents or keeping agents that you have now because of things that have happened to agents in the last several years?

A: No, we are not. Our recruiting is very good. Interestingly, it has generally maintained its quality during this period of criticism. The young people, particularly on our college campuses, have generally seen through the smoke screen and have come to us in as good numbers as before and the quality still remains very high. We take about one out of ten serious applicants. I'm not talking about people who telephone in, I'm talking about people we really process. The competition is very keen; and you may be in part referring to the fact that I had the unpleasant task last fall of commencing a reduction of 820 people in the Central Intelligence Agency; one I happen to think was long overdue, very necessary, in order to provide an opportunity for these younger people who are coming in to progress along and see that there is a career ahead of them. There was too much stagnation of fine people, all came in at the beginning you see, and now it's about 30 years afterwards and they're all up there towards the top, and because I want very much to ensure that my successor's successor out in the 1980s and 1990s will have the same high quality of people we have today. I want to provide that opportunity to the young people coming along and therefore I have felt it necessary to weed out some of the people at the top.

Q: Sir, you indicate that the CIA is number one in intelligence in the world. What kind of an adversary is the KGB?

A: The KGB is a very strong, clever, unscrupulous adversary. They put a great deal of money and effort into their intelligence work. I think I would have to say they are probably better than we in this human intelligence business. They devote thousands and thousands of people to it every year and they have increased the number of people they can send to this country because of all the kinds of new opportunities there are for interchange today. I believe we are well ahead of them in these technical means of collecting intelligence that I mentioned to you--ahead because of the basic drive, ingenuity, sophistication and intelligence of American industry that creates these technical opportunities for us. Finally, I would want to say that I think we will always remain ahead of them in one area, and that's evaluating intelligence data that we collect. Because the essence of that is to be sure that you look at it objectively, to be sure that you let alternative competitive views of interpretation come forward because no one of us is omniscient, and no set of intelligence data is so clear that you know exactly what it means. You must do a lot of interpretation. I assure you I believe that can be done much better in a free society where you encourage dissenting views, than in a totalitarian society where you lose your neck if you dissent.

Q: Admiral Turner, you mentioned a three-person oversight committee. How are these people selected and for what term, if it is a term of office?

A: They are selected strictly by the President as people in whom he has confidence. He picked a neighbor of yours, ex-Senator Gore. He picked ex-Governor Scranton. A democrat and a republican, people of great stature in our country. People I think we all have learned to respect over the years. He picked a man named Thomas Farmer, who is a lawyer in Washington, D.C., a very distinguished gentleman, the chairman of this board. There is no length of tenure on it; it's strictly a matter of do they please the President, do they do the job rigorously and the way he wants, and they meet with him regularly to keep him posted. I failed to mention in the course of discussing oversight that one of the people on the Senate Intelligence Oversight Committee, whom I particularly enjoy working with, is your own Senator Dee Huddleston. He just does a marvelous job for us.

Q: Sir, on the same plane of thought we had a while ago, is the CIA and FBI working effectively together or is there still a lot of animosity between the two agencies?

A: We're working very effectively together. There's been a tremendous improvement from the last days of Mr. Hoover's term when there was, admittedly very poor coordination between them. That has really turned around. I watched it carefully over this past year and am satisfied that it's in good shape.[at this point the cassette was turned over and a portion of the answer was lost.] I'm sure that the two of us are going to do everything we can to bring that relationship into an even more cooperative, warmer atmosphere in the years ahead.

Q: Inaudible.

A: Yes, we have a training program that lasts a different amount of time depending on whether you are going to end up working in the Headquarters being an analyst or a support person; or whether you are going to go out in the field and conduct our clandestine operations. We take everybody and put them through a basic course of understanding intelligence--having to understand almost a course in law to understand what we can do and what we can't do--understanding the organization, how we establish the requirements for what we want to collect, how we process that information and turn out finished estimates. If you are going to go out in the field and work, there is a great deal of tradecraft we call it, skills of the trade, operating agents in the field. The kind of skills that you have to have in almost every profession, any basic industry. We put people through an extra course of those and we might even, for instance, send three people out here to Lexington and make them walk around the streets and see if they could shake their tail, if you see what I mean. You put them out on a common street in some city and ask them to see if they can get rid of a deliberate surveillance that we have put on them--that kind of real tradecraft training. It's a rigorous course, it takes a lot of stamina. I know you would be as proud as I when I go down and see them in their training and hand out the certificates at their graduation; to see the high quality of young men and young women who go into this difficult business. Young men and young women who will then, after they graduate, go overseas, have to remain anonymous, have to tell their families they're working somewhere else, not take credit for this, look forward to many many years of this deprivation; working under very difficult conditions in sometimes very different cultures and societies, and to see them with the quality and

dedication that they have when they come to us. It's very heartwarming to know that we have that kind of reaction, that kind of person in our country today.

Q: What kind of motivation do these people have?

A: I think they really have a motivation of patriotism. Plus I would say to you that once you've been in the Central Intelligence Agency for a little while, you're just inspired by the enthusiasm, the importance of what's going on, and the high quality of the overall organization and people. I say that unabashedly because I've been there such a short time really that I'm not taking any credit for that. I'm saying that I've watched others come in and just get caught up in the professionalism, the enthusiasm of the organization. It's really a very highly dedicated group of people who know what they're doing and they inspire others who join to stick with it and to give it that same dedication.

Q: Would it be inappropriate to ask you something about the scope of operations? I am wondering would have maybe three, six, or a dozen agents in each South American country, or could you give us some idea with regard to scope without telling something you shouldn't tell?

A: I can say to you that our representation abroad obviously varies with the importance of the area; it varies with what we think will be the opportunity there, and you can appreciate that you have to gauge each individual country, each individual city that you want to be represented in, as to what its potential is for providing intelligence information back to you. We're constantly changing those allocations as the nation's interest changes, as the activities of the Soviet Union and the satellite countries change, as the activities of many of the other countries themselves change. So, it's difficult to give you a quantitative answer in a constantly changing target.

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